

# Back from the Dead

J.J. Johnson - Posted: 03.30.00

There I am; lying, strapped to a cold metal hospital table.

The wife is outside the room, helpless, and in tears.

Six men surround me, draped from head to toe in light blue, all prepared to rip my chest open on command, just in case someone - me - sneezes or makes a wrong move. Bright lights shine down on their backs and onto my face and body.

After being rushed to the hospital, and wheeled into this operating room, I've become almost comfortable with what's starting to look like a distinct possibility: That I may very shortly be meeting my Maker. I find myself thinking: What a way to go.

That's how it was on Saturday March 25, 2000. How did I get to where I am today - still alive and at home? And why am I able to not only be home, but to sit at the computer and write about the experience?

This is a story about how God sends messages to hard-headed folks like me. It will also answer a lot of questions about my current health condition. And about some other interesting things - like how some hospitals and doctors really operate.

Let me give you the whole story. Grab a seat around the campfire.

*Monday 03.20.00 - about 23:00hrs.*

After a wonderful home-cooked dinner, I was preparing to get offline and get some sleep so I could be ready for the 60 mile drive to McCarran Airport in Las Vegas, where Nancy had to be on a bird for Moscow-on-the-Pacific (more commonly known as "Los Angeles") by 6:00am. She was packing while I finished a last cigarette and headed for bed. As I lay down, I suddenly felt a sharp and frightening pressure on my chest.

Unlike many men in the country who avoid telling their wives about these little problems until it's almost - or totally too late, (we men tend to be a macho, stubborn lot,) I decided fast to un-macho myself, and to tell Nancy about this one - just in case. Because, well, it was *that* bad.

Here's what happened next:

I found myself in the passenger seat on a 65-mile brown-knuckle ride from Pahrump, Nevada to Desert Springs hospital in Las Vegas courtesy of my chauffeur, pulse-checker and frantic wife, Nancy Johnson. She was convinced I was "having the big one, Elizabeth!" Me - I couldn't tell. I just knew I was hurting and I was scared.

A side note here: That's right - Pahrump, Nevada is 65 miles from the nearest open hospital. This is a town whose population has just eclipsed 33,000 - many of whom are seniors. We WILL be at the next board meeting to lobby for a hospital here. But more on this later.

The week-long nightmare began with Nancy jumping out of the car at the emergency entrance yelling

at the top of her lungs:

"I think my husband's having a heart attack!"

Uniformed hospital staff members swarm out and grab me. Off into the bowels of the building I go in a wheelchair. At this point, all I want is another cigarette - and to sleep.

Pay attention here. This emergency room "ruse" may be the perfect way to vanish into the night, if ever the need arises.

Wheeled down the hall. A bunch of orderlies slam-dunk homeboy here onto Cardiac Unit 1A and start checking all over me for vitals. They attach so much high-tech medical gear on me that I look like what Star Trek fans know as "The Borg." Oxygen, EKG - the whole nine yards. Borg indeed - I was being "assimilated" into the Las Vegas medical system. And "resistance was futile" - almost. Believe me - I'll prove it before you're finished reading this.

Then the questions and answers. Rapid-fire. After answering "no" to the usual cardiac questions - no pain in left arm, no shortness of breath, no hot sweats - the mortifying personal information started leaking out.

"Johnson Jr, James, Black male; age 38; slightly overweight; has smoked about a pack a day for the last twenty years, is being treated for hypertension, and has a history of heart problems in his family; his sister died last year of a massive heart attack. She was only 40.

And oh, by the way, his wife is a lawyer - and she also holds a medical degree.

The best way to explain how the medical technicians reacted to the information in that last sentence is this: Imagine how the FBI would react if you pulled up to the J. Edgar Hoover FBI headquarters in D.C. in a Ryder truck, wanting to talk to them all about what happened in Waco. And you whipped out a pad and a tape-recorder and started taking down names, ranks and serial numbers.

Yeah, that's just how these folks reacted. I was immediately put under medical "lock down," where I was held for the next 48 hours. Blood pressure and heart rate were taken between every heartbeat. I had routine, round-the-clock visits from the local "vampires" wearing white coats and carrying huge needles.

"Blood samples, please."

My wife, the nursing staff, and even the other patients were convinced that I suffered from denial when I kept saying, "I feel fine, folks. Maybe it was just indigestion."

No dice, J.J. Based on the information I had given them, I was being held in the cardiac Unit of Desert Springs Hospital without bond. Remember: My sister had passed away from a heart attack at age 40, and I'm 38. There was something else at work here - the medical establishment's version of Murphy's Law.

The CPK level in my blood - CPK is an enzyme that goes up after a heart attack - would have told someone that I was okay. But they had lost the data when the phones (and computers) in the hospital stopped working - because of a computer glitch, according to Desert Springs. Can you believe this?

As is usual in many hospitals these days, with all the high tech gadgets, it's also very easy for the

hospital staff to forget that you're there - unless you become a real "female dog." That's what it took to get served food - and to find the right CPK levels. Nancy took care of most of this - being a rocket-scientist, she suggested checking the hard copy on the machine itself to find the CPK level which had been lost in cyberspace.

Duh.

I am convinced a conspiracy was being hatched on homeboy for several reasons:

- 1) Wife is an Attorney.
- 2) Insurance is a non-HMO (meaning no nosy billing questions asked.)
- 3) Wife is an Attorney.

Think I'm kidding? They had Nancy's business card taped to my medical charts so that anyone one checking could see it. So, let's keep J.J. here for as long as possible (soak the insurance), and do everything we can not to get sued.

Something was definitely wrong here.

We finally met the doctor. We'll call him "Dr. A." Doc A. ordered a stress test to be conducted the next day. He also made note that I was by far the youngest, and lightest (in body weight) person in the cardiac ward, and that I might have a bit of trouble on this test, because of having a bad heart and all. He casually mentioned that there have been times when a few unfortunate souls have had heart attacks before even completing the test.

*Wednesday, 03.22.00  
Time 11:30 hrs PT*

The nuclear technicians were amazed. For a man with the heart problems they had listed to actually finish a stress test of this nature was simply unreal. But I did. However, I couldn't have lasted 10 more seconds. No chest pains, no heart problems noticed. Even one of the technicians said, "There's nothing wrong with you, Mr. Johnson."

But that means nothing in the medical world's pecking order. It takes a full-blown doctor to say this and have it mean something. In this case, Dr. A. was The Man. So, I figured - as soon as he goes over the cardiac x-ray photos, and the data from the stress test, he'll see that I shouldn't be here. And I can go home.

But this never happened since he never bothered to read the data. Thus, J.J. Johnson becomes totally stuck in Hospital Purgatory.

What also wasn't on the report was that Nancy and I are both Cyber-geeks. We will both probably be buried with our laptops. That fabulous lawyer lady went on a mission while I was still caught in that cardiac spider's web and poked around in the phone lines in the wall of the cardiac unit.

And she hit pay-dirt. She plugged us in, booted us up, and started surfing.

Since we had been told that simply walking out "AMA" (Against Medical Advice) would cause the insurance company to not cover anything, Nancy found another local cardiologist on the web. We'll call him, "Dr. B". We were seeking a second opinion - for that matter - a *first* opinion. After all we had been there all night and day and we still had really heard nothing conclusive.

Doc B. said he could "look into it," but I had to check out of St. Purgatory Hospital first.

Fat chance of that happening - the meter was still running. There was no one to sign anything other than Doc A. - who couldn't be found anywhere.

What made it worse was when a nurse showed up for yet another test. She quickly looked at the results and said, "You're not sick, are you?"

"No, I'm not. I just want to go home, thank you."

"Sorry, I'm not a doctor. You'll have to wait for Dr. A - wherever he is."

We then decided that the only way out was just to leave, but we needed to check with our insurance people first. So we called them. And we told various folks at the insurance company the same thing we had been told at least 5 times by almost every member of the hospital staff:

"If I leave now, the insurance will not cover anything"

The insurance company's response: "Who told you that crap?"

So much for the hospital's "defense." Now, we decided, it was time to go on the offensive - in the worst possible way.

Meet Mr. & Mrs. Cardiac Patients from Hell.

First, I got dressed and began simply walking around the hospital corridors. Lots of walking, lots of corridors. Up and down. Up and down. Obviously I couldn't take my heart-monitoring paraphernalia with me on these jaunts. I'm sure the heart monitoring people thought I was dead until they found my heart meter - tucked under the sheets on my bed.

*"Security! Big Black man on the loose - roaming the cardiac floor!"*

The Corridor-strolling Strategy was compounded by Nancy, who started paying visits to other patients, and handing out her business cards to every patient in sight - you know, just in case they might need legal representation against a certain unnamed medical center in the future.

It's called, "Operation: Wear-Out-Your-Welcome."

Some head nurse finally decided to put a stop to these shenanigans, but when she came to berate us, she instead found us packing to leave around 6:00p.m. We had just had enough. She told us that Dr. A. was gone for the evening, that he could not be reached (meaning another night there for yours truly and yours truly's attorney-wife), and then she recited that same LIE yet again - the one about what would happen if we left "AMA."

"Um, we called our insurance company. They'll cover us. I'm going home to update our NEWS website for the morning, thank you."

Florence Nightingale vanished into thin air.

And then five - and I mean no more than five minutes later, we heard, "Mr. Johnson, Dr. A. will be here

in twenty minutes. He can give you a full report on your condition."

Amazing.

Dr. A. arrived, huffing and puffing from whatever dinner party we pulled him out of, but he was more than happy for us to get a second opinion - as long as we got out of his face for the night. And for good.

He signed the release. And we were out of there. And we drove home - all 65 miles.

*Thursday 03.23.00 - 11:00 hrs*

Another 65 mile trip in to Las Vegas placed us in the office of Dr. B. After a blood-pressure check, an EKG, and a few questions honestly answered:

"You're not sick, are you, Mr. Johnson?"

His prescription was mere medical advice: Quit smoking. Quit living, and eating like an American.

He let me go, but wanted to check the records to make sure.

But he found he couldn't get them.

Dr. A. had never looked at them - after over 24 hours of having them available for him to look at - nor had he signed for the right for anyone else to look at them either. If my condition had really been serious, I could have been dead by the time he released them. Dr. A. again, could not be found, but would return Dr. B's phone call - maybe later. Sometime later.

I was sent home. I'd been diagnosed with indigestion and stress, and told that I should just take it easy and relax. After this convoluted nightmare, Nancy and I went home and did just that.

But the nightmare was only beginning.

**READ PART TWO**